

*NextGen: A Review of the RTCA Mid-Term
Implementation Task Force Report*



**Statement of James C. May
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before the
Subcommittee on Aviation
of the
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
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AIR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION

The NextGen Task Force, admirably led by Captain Dickson, did an outstanding job of setting a course to transition to NextGen. As important as that accomplishment is, there is a larger lesson to be learned from the Task Force's success in laying out what can be achieved. It is the urgency of benefiting from NextGen as soon as possible.

Saying this doesn't mean that we don't deeply appreciate the Task Force's efforts. On the contrary: The case for modernization is so compelling and so widely accepted, and the need is so great, that the introduction of what all agree is readily available technology and the procedures to fully leverage it must be a national priority. To make that priority a reality, the federal government – at the highest levels – must provide decisive leadership and a substantial financial commitment.

Summing things up: We know what NextGen can do; the technology is proven. We know that we need NextGen; stakeholders uniformly want its benefits. We know what has to be done operationally and financially. What we now need is the federal government to make NextGen an early reality.

The federal role is indispensable if we are to have an airport and airway system that can responsibly meet the air transportation needs of our nation. The system does not do that today, as we all too often realize. The burden of this failure on our economy is staggering. Congress' Joint Economic Committee estimated that flight delays in 2007 cost the economy \$41 billion. Airlines, their customers and the communities that they serve cannot afford to continue to pay the price of an obsolete air traffic control (ATC) system.

Modernization of the ATC system, however, must be based on a positive business case. Without that justification, we will not see the level and pace of investment that will produce the operational and environmental benefits that are so achievable from NextGen. Such forgone opportunities are intolerable. We have already witnessed that, for instance, in the failure to have an RNP/RNAV procedure available when SeaTac's \$1 billion third runway opened last November.

The federal government holds the keys to making NextGen a reality sooner rather than later. This must be a national priority, to which all necessary resources must be devoted. Government leadership and full funding can make it happen in several years, not in the third decade of this century as is assumed today. Accepting anything less ambitious will needlessly shortchange our country.

Leadership, I want to point out, includes exhibiting the wherewithal to overcome the political differences that an undertaking of this magnitude will inevitably create. We need to be candid and acknowledge this state of affairs. For example, this means that we cannot dither over implementing the FAA's New York airspace redesign plan. NextGen won't work in New York or anywhere else if individual interests frustrate the airspace improvements that will indisputably benefit us all.

Leadership also includes accountability. Clear metrics must be established to measure the progress of the government as it quickly introduces NextGen. Without such measurable responsibility, we put at grave risk the necessary speed and effectiveness in bringing NextGen on line within the next few years.

Finally, leadership means a very serious commitment to infrastructure investment. That is something we're all familiar with on the ground; now it needs to be applied to equipping aircraft to take advantage of NextGen technology. Given the cost of equipage and the length of time it could take for an individual user to see a payback in such an investment, such funding is crucial. This is infrastructure investment that can pay off in the next few years; that payoff is within our reach. To place this in perspective, were Congress to provide a level of funding comparable to its funding for high-speed rail projects in this year's stimulus legislation, NextGen would be an early reality.

Without this leadership and funding, implementation of NextGen will drag on, and our nation will suffer even more from airport and airway congestion.

The Task Force has ably prepared our flight plan. We need to speed up our arrival at our final destination.